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NSC BRIEFING

29 December 1960

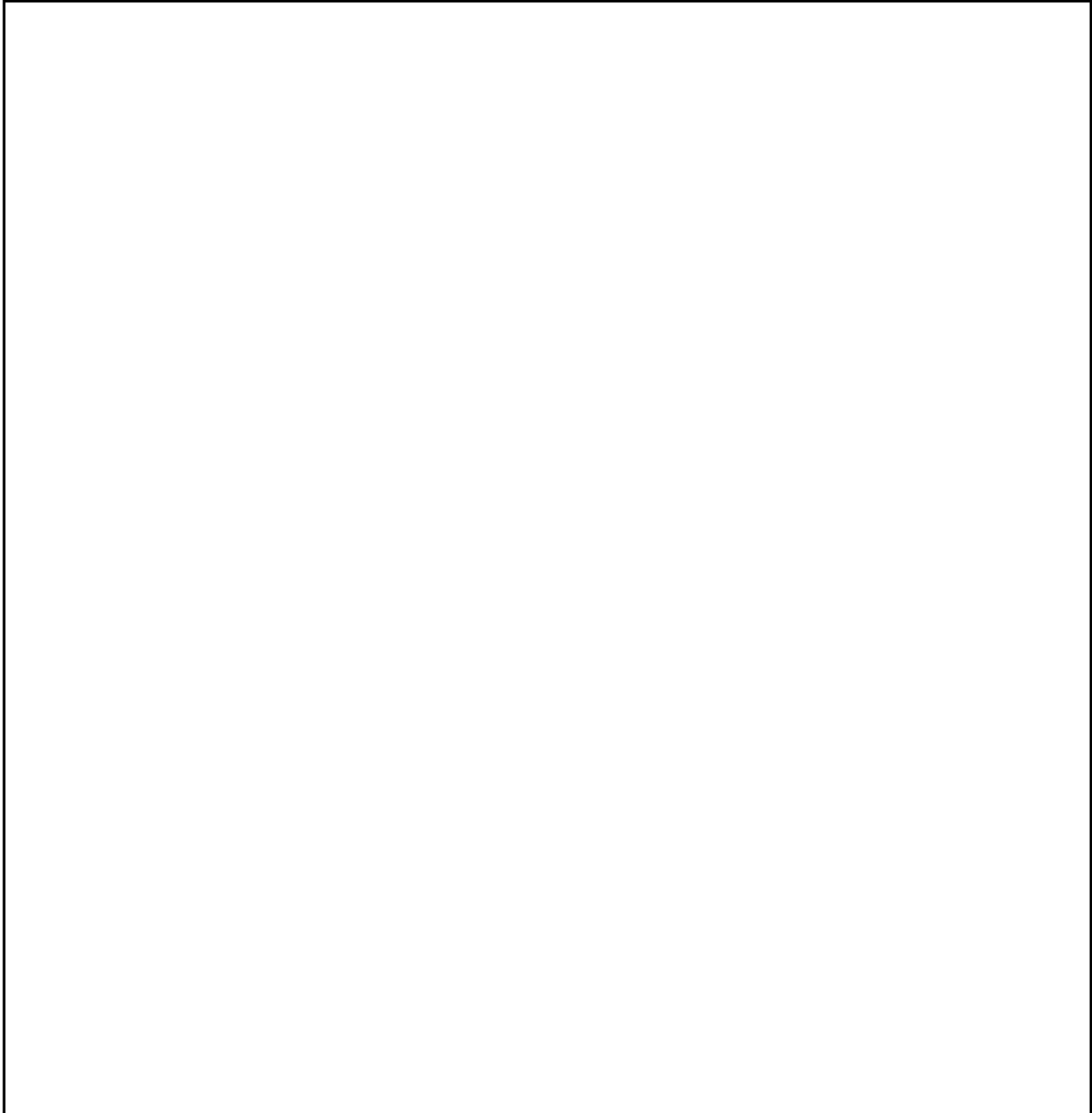
LAOS

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State Department review
completed

I. The Communists remain determined to prevent any pro-Western
government from establishing effective control in Laos.

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- C. Khrushchev in a private talk with the British ambassador on 26 December, provided what may be an indication that Moscow regards current Bloc activities as a long-term operation.
1. He said the USSR would continue to aid anti-Phoumi forces and that, while fighting on the present scale could go on for as long as seven years, he felt no major war would result.
 2. Khrushchev's remark suggests the bloc does not contemplate open intervention with identifiable military forces under present circumstances.
- D. In a 22 December note to the British, the USSR proposed reconvening the International Control Commission for Laos and another meeting of nations involved in the 1954 Geneva Agreements--both of which the Boun Oum government would oppose.
1. This move timed to take advantage of growing international fear of possible expansion of hostilities over Laos.
 2. Bloc public statements continue to create an air of tension about developments in Laos.
 3. Communist China has endorsed Soviet and North Vietnam's proposals to reconvene the ICC in Laos warning that "the war in Laos is pregnant with danger of future expansion" unless a solution is reached on Communist terms.
- II. In Laos itself, three columns of government troops are moving northward from Vientiane against Kong Le/Pathet Lao forces.
- A. One column, moving up main road to Luang Prabang, has captured Phong Hong, about 40 miles north of Vientiane.

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B. Other two columns moving west and east of main column are trying to clear area of pockets of Pathet strength as they move northward.

III. Bulk of Kong Le's force has apparently withdrawn to Vang Vieng area, about 70 miles north of Vientiane.

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B. Government sources claim morale among Kong Le troops-- particularly the several hundred irregulars--is poor; however, Kong Le will still probably be able to count on hard-core of troops from his Second Paratroop Battalion, numbering about 200 men.

1. These elements could serve as cadres for an expanded Kong Le/Pathet force which would pose potent guerrilla threat to government.

IV. General Phoumi and his advisors appear to be dragging their feet on question of legitimizing Boun Oum government through a National Assembly vote.

- A. Assembly action would make it easier for neutrals such as India to accept the new government, but Phoumi and company clearly would like follow Marshal Sarit's example in Thailand by rewriting constitution and revamping whole government structure.
- B. King Savang now in Vientiane to buttress new Boun Oum regime through ceremonial association with the crown.
- C. Ever a stickler for constitutional form, Savang may add his voice to those pressing for assembly vote.
- V. Former Premier Souvanna Phouma, in Phnom Penh, is being assiduously cultivated by the Soviet ambassador.
 - A. This obvious effort offset Western pressures on Souvanna to drop his pretension that he still legal head of government in Laos.
 - B. Souvanna big prize for Soviets; if he could be induced to go to Sam Neua to head up rival government to Boun Oum regime, he would give bloc support for Pathets and Kong Le aura of legitimacy.
 - C. Extreme leftist Quinim Pholsena, who briefly in control in Vientiane during battle for capital, already in Sam Neua claiming over Pathet radio to represent legal government of Laos.

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